Chapter 6
BRISK
PEEK
BRISK
BRISK
OH, GOOD TIMING!
...ER, WHAT'S GOING ON?
TA-DAAA
...TO TRY THIS ON!
I WANT YOU...

Chapter 6 The Garden Banquet ①

THE GARDEN BANQUET, OF COURSE.
WHAT GARDEN BAN-QUET?
...FRILLY OUTFIT FOR?
WHAT'S THIS...
MY CHEST IS...
...SILLY ME, GETTING MY HOPES UP LIKE THAT.
LOOM
I THOUGHT IT'D BE OFF THIS YEAR, SO WE COULD REST EASY.
...AND FEATURES LOTS OF ENTERTAIN-MENTS...
...AS WELL AS A FEAST FOR ALL.
OHH.
AHH.
THE GARDEN BANQUET, I'M TOLD ...
...IS AN EVENT HELD TWICE A YEAR IN THE PALACE GARDENS. IT DRAWS IMPORTANT GUESTS...

PRINCIPAL CONSORTS
WHEN THE EMPEROR IS WITHOUT AN EMPRESS...
...THE PRINCIPAL CONSORTS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND IN HER PLACE.
THE PRINCIPAL CONSORTS ARE...
...THE FOUR HIGHEST-RANKING WOMEN AMONG THE EMPEROR'S SECONDARY WIVES.
LADY LIHUA, THE WORTHY CONSORT.
LADY GYOKUYO, THE HONORED CONSORT.
LADY ADUO, THE PURE CONSORT.
LADY LISHU, THE VIRTUOUS CONSORT.

WHAT DO WE DO THERE?
SIGH
NOT MUCH, REALLY.
THIS TIME, ALL FOUR CONSORTS WILL BE IN ATTEN-DANCE.
CONSORT LISHU AND CONSORT ADUO WERE THE ONLY ONES AT THE WINTER BANQUET ...
...SINCE BOTH CONSORT GYOKUYO AND CONSORT LIHUA...
...HAD JUST GIVEN BIRTH.
TEE-HEE!
...WE MUST SIMPLY KEEP THE EMPEROR COMPANY.
AS INVITED GUESTS...

THAT REMINDS ME, MAOMAO! VARIOUS OFFICIALS WILL COME TO GREET US NOW AND AGAIN...
...SO DON'T FORGET TO DAZZLE THEM WITH SMILES!
HUH?
... OFFI- CIALS ...?
TEE- HEE! TEE- HEE!
...DOES THAT INCLUDE ALL OF THEM?
GRAB
OF COURSE IT DOES!
ON TOP OF THIS BEING PRINCESS LINGLI'S DEBUT...
...ALL FOUR CONSORTS WILL BE THERE!
THIS IS WAR!
WE MUST PREPARE OURSELVES FOR WHAT'S TO COME!

AND AS LONG AS MEALS ARE BEING SERVED...
...THEY'LL NEED ME, THE FOOD TASTER, ON HAND.
WE GOT THIIIIIS!
WELL ...
... CONSORT GYOKUYO DOESN'T HAVE MANY LADIES-IN-WAITING TO BEGIN WITH, SO...
...I DON'T THINK A NEWCOMER LIKE ME CAN SIT THIS ONE OUT...
URGH...
...BUT REALLY? I HAVE TO SMILE?
I DON'T THINK I HAVE IT IN ME...
GRIN
...AND SOME TO GO AROUND YOUR HIPS TOO. WOULD THAT BE ALL RIGHT WITH YOU?
I DO THINK IT WOULD BE BETTER TO ADD A LITTLE PADDING THERE...
HMM, YES.
DO WHAT YOU WILL WITH ME.

NOTHING WRONG WITH HIDING THOSE FRECKLES ONCE IN A WHILE!
ちょん。
POKE
I'LL DO YOUR MAKEUP ON THE DAY TOO!
HMM, HMM
HMM!
.....
...TO THE PRIVY CAN EASILY TAKE 30 MINUTES.
THE PALACE GARDENS ARE ABSURDLY VAST, SO JUST GETTING FROM THERE...
...THE COLD WILL BE A PROBLEM.
GOING BY WHAT THE HEAD LADY'S MAID SAID...
HMM...

BUT YOU SEE, MAO-MAO...
OUR GREATEST ENEMY DURING THE GARDEN BANQUET IS THE COLD!
ヒュオ
THERE'S A TERRIBLE CHILL IN THE AIR, DESPITE IT BEING THE START OF SPRING...
オオオ
WHOOOOOSH
WHEN IT'S TIME FOR THE WINTER GARDEN BANQUET ...
...AN IRON BLADDER WILL BE AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY.
IN WHICH CASE...
WHAT ARE YOU COOKING UP?
OH, WHAT A LOVELY, SWEET SCENT!
57

I THOUGHT I MIGHT BRING THE CANDY TO THE BANQUET...
...WHILE COOKED GINGER HAS A WARMING EFFECT ON THE BODY.
ORANGE PEEL PROMOTES BLOOD CIRCULA-TION...
CANDY MADE OF GINGER AND MANDARIN ORANGES.
SLICK つや
SLICK つや
BUBBLE
BUBBLE
OHHH...

...WELL, YES, THERE'S THAT, BUT...

SO THIS IS WHAT YOU'VE BEEN BUSY WITH LATELY.
BUSTLE じゃ
いえ BUSTLE

ぱ
WHAP

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I SEWED A POCKET INTO MY UNDER-SHIRT.
IT'LL BE COLD DURING THE PARTY, RIGHT?
I CAN INSERT A HEATED STONE TO STAY WARM.
M—
ふる TREMBLE
MAO-MAO ...!
ふる TREMBLE
I'M BEGGING YOU! PLEASE MAKE THESE FOR US ALL!!

UH...
SURE.
STITCH ちく
STITCH ちく
SWF ズッ
CAN I ASK YOU TO DO MINE TOO?
A—
AND MINE AS WELL ...
......
A FEW DAYS LATER
PLEASE TEACH US HOW TO DO IT.
SURE...
EVEN THE EMPEROR'S PERSONAL SEAMSTRESS AND COOK...

ONLY TOOK ME WORKING ON THE SLY UNTIL THE DAY BEFORE THE PARTY TO GET THESE POCKETS DONE...
MAYBE I'LL MAKE THAT JUST IN CASE TOO.

THE JADE PALACE
THE DAY OF THE GARDEN BANQUET
SCARLET LOCKS STYLED UP WITH TWO HAIR ORNAMENTS ADORNED BY FLOWERS...
SILK TASSELS AND JADE BEADS DRIPPING FROM DAGGER-LIKE SILVER HAIRPINS...
A GOWN OF RED IN ITS MANY HUES...
SWEEPING SLEEVES EMBROIDERED WITH GOLD THREAD...
ONLY THE EMPEROR'S FAVORITE COULD PULL OFF AN ENSEMBLE...
...OF SUCH BOLD DESIGN.

すSWISH
YOU LOOK STUNNING, MY LADY!
NOW I GET WHY THEY SAY SHE WEARS RED BEST IN ALL THE LAND.
MY DEAR LADIES-IN-WAITING...
TO KEEP YOU SAFE FROM THE UNWANTED ATTENTIONS OF DIS-AGREEABLE PESTS...
...I WISH TO BESTOW UPON YOU TOKENS OF MY AFFECTION.
THRILL わくわく
THRILL わく
?
シャラン JINGLE

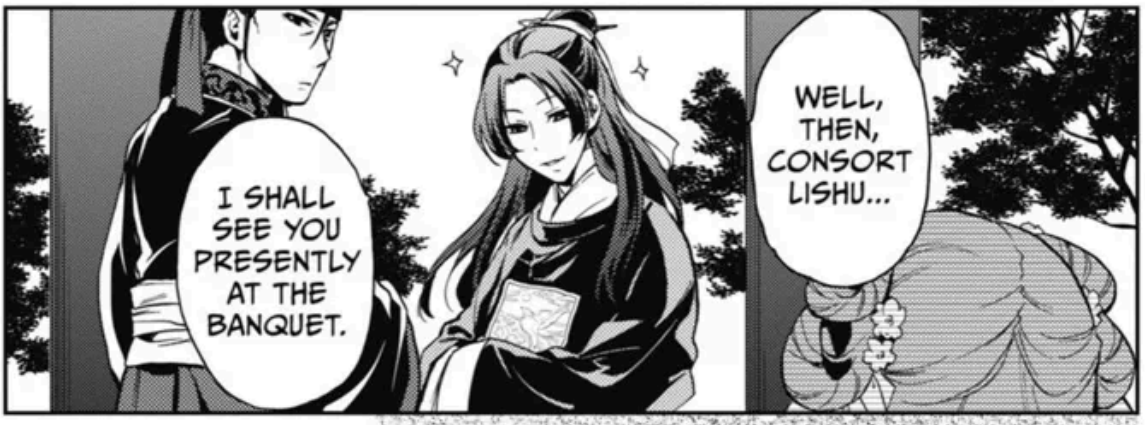
WITH THIS, I CLAIM YOU AS MY OWN.
YOU SEE, DON'T YOU?
SWF
AND NOW ...!
GRAB
WAH!
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
TH...

CORNER
UM!
WAIT!
CORNER
TEE HEE HEE!
TIME FOR YOUR MAKEUP!
COME BACK TO ME...
...ALL DOLLED UP AND LOVELY, NOW!

FIRST, WE'LL CLEAN YOUR FACE...
...AND THEN PERFUME IT WITH OIL.
RUB
RUB
RUB
RUB
WAI—
BWFF!

...OHH?

...WHY, MAO-MAO, YOU...


I SHALL SEE YOU PRESENTLY AT THE BANQUET.
WELL, THEN, CONSORT LISHU...

...SIR JINSHI!
YES...

HE'S ALL SMILES.
HEH!
NEXT UP IS THE HONORED CONSORT, HMM?
MWEH HEH HEH!
HIS STAUNCH SUPPORT OF LADY GYOKUYO ...
...IS ALL BECAUSE HIS FAVORITE NEW TOY RESIDES AT THE CONSORT'S PALACE.
WHAT A TRULY IMPOS-SIBLE MAN.
GOOD DAY, CONSORT GYOKUYO.

OH! I BID YOU GOOD DAY AS WELL.
MY LADY, YOU LOOK...
...SIMPLY EXQUISITE. RED REALLY IS YOUR COLOR.
WHY, THANK YOU!
HEE HEE HEE!
NOT ONLY ARE YOU RADIANT...
SPARKLE SPARKLE
...YOU MIGHT ALSO SAY...
...YOUR EYES OF JADE LEND YOU A CERTAIN AIR OF MYSTERY.
NOW, DO TELL!
zwoop ぴょこ
HOW FARES THE PRIN-CESS?
THE IDLER'S BACK, I SEE.

GOOD DAY...
...SIR JINSHI.
.....
OH...
UH-HUH.

I AM NOT.
I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU FOR A MOMENT THERE.
ARE YOU WEARING MAKEUP?

NO.
YOU COVERED THEM UP WITH SOME-THING, RIGHT?
BUT YOUR FRECKLES ARE GONE.

?

THEY'RE GONE BECAUSE I REMOVED MY MAKEUP.

YOU'VE ALWAYS SEEN ME WITH MY FACE MADE UP.
SIGH
I USE DRIED CLAY TO ADD FRECKLES TO MY FACE DAILY.
UGH, EXPLAINING MYSELF IS GOING TO BE A PAIN.
MAKEUP ISN'T ONLY...
...FOR MAKING SOMEONE LOOK MORE BEAUTIFUL.
DO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW?
...WHAT'S THE POINT OF ALL THAT, THEN?

I DID IT TO AVOID GETTING DRAGGED DOWN A BACK ALLEY.
THOUGH IT'S THE PLEASURE DISTRICT, THERE ARE MEN WHO ARE STARVED FOR FEMALE COMPANIONSHIP.
THEY HAVE NO MONEY FOR A BROTHEL, TEND TO VIOLENCE ...
...AND OFTEN CARRY VENEREAL DISEASES AS WELL.
BEING A SMALL, SCRAWNY, HOMELY GIRL...
...MADE ME LESS LIKELY TO BE A TARGET.

...BUT WHEN I LIVED IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT, I TATTOOED THE FRECKLES RIGHT ONTO MY FACE.
THEY'VE MOSTLY FADED NOW...
WERE YOU EVER ATTACKED IN SUCH A WAY?
INSTEAD ...
...WHEN I WENT OUT TO HARVEST INGREDIENTS FOR THE DYE I'D NEED TO REFRESH MY TATTOOS...
...I WAS KIDNAPPED BY FLESH MERCHANTS.
SOME TRIED AND FAILED.
PHEW.

I AM SORRY ...
...FOR THE LACK OF PRUDENCE ON THE PART OF THOSE OVER-SEEING PALACE LABOR.
IT'S FINE.
IT'S NOT ALL THAT DIFFERENT FROM BEING SOLD OFF BY FAMILY.
I'M BEYOND CARING AT THIS POINT.

DOES IT NOT MAKE YOU ANGRY, THOUGH?
OF COURSE IT DOES.
I WAS UNSURE OF THE RIGHT TIME TO GO FRESH-FACED...
...SO I JUST KEPT UP WITH THE MAKEUP.
BUT...
...YOU AREN'T THE ONE TO BLAME, SIR JINSHI.
...BUT SELLING A FAMILY MEMBER TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF MOUTHS TO FEED IS LEGAL.
...ABDUCTING AND SELLING A PERSON IS A CRIME...
IN THIS LAND...

EVEN IF SOMEONE IS BOUGHT FROM A KIDNAP-PER...
...THEIR CAPTOR GOES UNPUNISHED UNLESS REPORTED BY THE BUYER.
IT'S STILL INEXCUS-ABLE.
WHO KNEW HE COULD BE SO GENUINE?
SHHK サクッ

OH.
THAT HURT.
YOU CAN HAVE IT.

...SEE YOU AT THE PARTY.
WELL ...
WHY DO I SEEM TO KEEP GETTING THESE THINGS?
A MAN'S HAIRPIN?

AWW! LUCKYYY!
OOOH!
WERE I TO SELL IT, I BET I'D GET A GOOD PRICE.
SHAKE ふる
SHAKE ふる
TOUCH そっ
I WANT IT~! I WANT ONE~!
I DON'T MIND GIVING IT TO THEM...
...BUT I'VE ONLY GOT THE ONE...
I SEE YOU'VE ...
...ALREADY GONE AND BROKEN YOUR PROMISE WITH ME.

COME, NOW.
FIRST A NECK-LACE, NOW A HAIRPIN...
WHAT IN THE WORLD CAN THEY MEAN?
YOU MAY BE MY LADY-IN-WAITING, BUT YOU'RE NO LONGER MINE ALONE.
?
LET'S BE OFF.

THE GARDEN BANQUET'S ABOUT TO BEGIN.